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## Fire and Ice Sermon Series

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# The Nature of Christ's Resurrection

by Samuel Willard

Question 28. Wherein consists Christ's Exaltation?

**A**nswer. Christ's Exaltation consists in his rising again from the dead on the third day, in ascending up to heaven, and in sitting at the right hand of God the Father, and in coming to judge the world at the last day.

[This is the second of a five sermon series on this question from the Westminster Shorter Catechism.]

**L**eaving the general consideration of Christ's Exaltation, we will continue with a more detailed account. There are several steps to his Exaltation, which may be summarised under two heads: either those degrees of triumph, to which he is exalted already, or the manifestation of it which is reserved for the Day of Judgement. God has already highly lifted him up, but he will yet make his glory known more conspicuously at the end of the world. The saints in heaven see his face in glory and are happy in that sight. Believers on earth see him with an eye of faith and rejoice in it, 1 Pet. 1:8, "Whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory." At that time his enemies also will see him. They had seen him dead and buried, that was the last sight they had of him: but they must see him glorified to their eternal confusion, Rev. 1:7 "Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen."

Let us consider the glorification which Christ has received already. It consists in two things: his resurrection from death, and his taking possession of the kingdom

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of glory. We will begin with his resurrection because it was the first step of his glorification, after he had humbled himself in death.

This article is a main pillar of the Christian faith, and we need to be well established on it. As the apostles were appointed to be witnesses of the resurrection of Christ (Acts 1:22), so they preached it clearly in every place they came. We may take a brief account of it under several heads.

I. *The precise nature of Christ's resurrection* consists of two things: there is something *internal*, the reunion of his soul and body, and *external*, his coming out of the grave after that reunion. Both of these are implied by the words used in the New Testament to express resurrection. The word used in Matt. 28:6, *εγειρω*, signifies both to wake out of sleep and to rise out of bed. When Christ's soul came into his body he awakened, and when he left his sepulchre, then he left his bed. Resurrection is also expressed by *αναστασις*, which signifies rising from a fall and standing up again. Christ fell down into the dust when he died, and stood up again when he arose. The first of these was properly his resurrection, and the second the manifestation of it.

II. *The subject of this resurrection* may be considered in two categories.

1. *The precise subject of the resurrection was the whole human nature of Christ.* Christ is said to die and to rise again, 1 Cor. 15:14,15. It is attributed to his person in respect to his human nature because his divine nature is not in itself capable of either Humiliation or Exaltation. The resurrection may be attributed to his whole human nature in as much as both his soul and body were sharers in it. His entire humanity fell by death in some sense, and his soul therefore arose by a deliverance from the state of separation and its reunion, and his body arose by a restoration to life and being brought out of the grave.

2. *The resurrection is ascribed to his body, his soul, and his person* in various regards, as:

It was his body that was most strictly raised. That only fell down; while his soul went upward to paradise, Luke 23:43, "Today you will be with me in paradise." Only his body lay in the grave, his soul ascended to heaven. Only his body was completely deprived of its working, for his soul as it departed was actively happy in the presence of God.

1. *Now, regarding his body:*

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a. *It was the same body that fell, which was raised again.* Matt. 28:5,6 “But the angel answered and said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.” He did not take upon himself another body to be exalted in, but the same in which he was humbled.

b. *His rational soul came from heaven into the sepulchre, where his body lay, and was there reunited with it.* Psa. 16:10 “For you will not leave my soul in Sheol.” This must be understood as the state of separation.

c. *His vital spirits, which had been dissipated by death, were again restored and helped to knit his soul and body together.* For this reason he is said to be alive again, Rom. 14:9 “For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living.”

d. *His senses were also restored to his body.* His organs of sensation had been deprived of their power by his death and had been useless, but now his eyes and ears and other organs of sensation received their power of operation. Thus they were prepared to serve his rational soul according to their natural use, and were evident proof of his being alive again, Acts 1:3.

e. *The prison doors were opened and he came out of his grave.* His body was raised a glorious body, Phil. 3:21, 1 Cor. 15:43. However, the glorious splendour of his body was veiled for a time as he thought it appropriate. This was for a few days while he abode with his disciples before his ascension, so that they might be able to have communion with him.

2. *Regarding his soul,* while it may not be quite correct to say that it arose, nevertheless a resurrection is connected with it.

a. *It was reunited with his body after separation.* Otherwise his body would not have arisen. Its death was effected by that separation, and therefore its resurrection required such a reunion.

b. *In this way it was delivered from that separation which was contrary to its natural inclination* and was made again to enjoy the desired company of the body. A separated soul, being only a part of the man, is not at rest until it is restored to the other part for which it was made, and so undergoes a sort of death while separate.

c. *It came out of the sepulchre with and in his body, and so it joined with it in the second part of his resurrection.* It was for this cause that his body was enabled to come forth, which before was lifeless.

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d. *It now enjoyed its previous freedom of exercising its operations upon and in his glorious body.* It had again the use of all his senses and members, which had been for a while suspended.

e. *Both together took possession of the glory which he had merited with both in his humiliation,* Psa. 16:9-11. His mediatorial glory was not completed until he was thus raised.

3. *Regarding his person,* it is certain that he who arose was Christ, the second Person of the Trinity. As it was mentioned before, the divine nature of Christ, being unchangeable, could neither die nor rise. Nevertheless the declarative glory of his divine nature which was obscured in the days of his flesh began to radiate out and shine forth clearly in his resurrection. Therefore, Christ is "...declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead," Rom. 1:4. In this regard it was a declarative begetting of Christ, Acts 13:33, "God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that he has raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm: 'You are my Son, today I have begotten You.'" Christ as mediator was now glorified to fulfil the promise made to him in the Covenant of Redemption.

III. *Christ really did rise again.* The Scripture gives abundant testimony to this. Because it is a matter of historical fact, the historical witness alone should be a sufficient reason for faith to accept it; although there are also persuasive arguments to accept it, such as:

1. *There is the testimony of the two glorious angels for the resurrection,* Matt. 28:5,6 and Luke 24:45,46.

2. *The testimony of the women that went to the sepulchre, where they saw him and spoke with him,* Matt. 28:9.

3. *The various appearances which he made to his disciples.* Before his ascension he was seen by at least five hundred persons who had his resurrection confirmed by many tangible and convincing proofs, 1 Cor. 15:5-8.

4. *In particular there is the testimony of the Apostles,* who because they were to be bearers of this truth, and witnesses to the world, had frequent communion with him at times, for forty days after he had risen, Acts 1:3, during which time they "looked upon and handled" the "Word of life," 1 John 1:1,2. Therefore, Luke 24:39,40, "Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Handle me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have. When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet." "Then He said to Thomas, 'Reach

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your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing,” John 20:27.

5. *Indeed the very nature of the thing declares that he must be risen.* If he was the Son of God and by his death satisfied for sin, and answered all the demands of justice in the place of his redeemed, it was impossible that the grave could hold him. Therefore when he had lain in it long enough to confirm the reality of his being dead, there was no reason for his lying there any longer. Thus the Scripture argues, “God raised [him] up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that he should be held by it,” Acts 2:24.

IV. *If it should be demanded, by what power did he arise, or who was the causative agent of his resurrection?* It may be replied, that it was not any other outside power, but he himself was the author of his own rising from the dead. This he clearly prophesied beforehand, John 2:19 and 10:17,18. It is true that this work is ascribed to the Father, Acts 2:24. Being the Creditor, now fully satisfied in the discharge of the debt which his Son determined to pay, sent his angel as an officer to discharge him with glorious pomp and majesty. This work is also attributed to the Spirit, Rom. 8:11, because he was raised by a glorious and almighty power. This power did not manifest itself so much in the raising of his body from the grave (though nothing but omnipotent power could do that), as in releasing the chains of the second death which were upon him in his state of humiliation, and in discharging him from the sentence of the Law, by which he was condemned to die as our surety and representative. Indeed this work, being a divine work, belongs to the Deity and consequently to the Trinity. Yet Christ attributes this work to himself because his divine nature exerted itself mightily in his resurrection. As it was by a voluntary act that he laid down his life, and no one else could have taken it from him, so by an act of his mighty power he took it up again. Death himself could not stand against him, and he became a conqueror over it. In his own person Christ fulfilled the prophecy, Hosea 13:14 “I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. O Death, I will be your plagues! O Grave, I will be your destruction! Pity is hidden from my eyes.” The angels who were present at the resurrection were not the instruments of it, but only waited on their Lord and honoured him in this phase of his Exaltation.

V. *Christ’s resurrection was on the third day after his death and burial,* Luke 24:7. This was foretold by Christ himself, John 2:19. “And be raised the third day,” Matt. 16:21. In this regard he claimed that Jonah was a type of himself,

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Matt. 12:39,40. He continued three days in a state of death, in order that there would be no question about his being truly dead. It was no longer in order that his disciples would not faint in their spirits and be discouraged by the corruption of his body, because it was foretold that it would not see corruption, Psa. 16:10. It is true, that he did not lay in the grave three whole days, but it was for some part of three successive days. He was buried on the sixth day (Friday) before sunset, and he lay in the grave the entire seventh day (Saturday) and the night of the first day (Sunday), considering the day to begin with the sunset.

VI. *It was required that Christ should rise from the dead.* Just as he had to die, he had to rise and live. This was necessary for several reasons:

1. *He rose again to prove and declare that he was the Son of God,* Rom. 1:4. During his Humiliation, and particularly in his death, Christ's divinity was obscured under a veil of the many infirmities of his humanity, but in his resurrection he proved his eternal power and Godhead. Indeed it is true that others were raised, and indeed shortly all shall rise; therefore merely to be raised from the dead is not proof of the divinity of the one raised. Yet, for someone to raise himself by his own power, that is sufficient proof of divinity. He gave evidence of divinity by raising others in his name, but he was required to raise himself by his own power to prove himself God.

There was a further proof of his divinity in the resurrection, in that he died according to the Law and justice of God, sentenced as our Surety to suffer the whole weight of the wrath of God. For him to be released from this sentence, after he had been born for that very purpose, and to live again having fulfilled all the demands of justice upon him, proves him to be God. The weight of wrath that he bore would have broken the whole of creation, and they would never have been released.

2. *In this way he attested to his perfect victory over death and our spiritual enemies.* It was not enough that Christ should die for us. In dying he must be a conqueror, otherwise his death would not profit us. Indeed, he suffered in order that he might overcome, Heb. 2:14, "That through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil." This was shown and proven by his resurrection. This is the reason why Paul, after he had demonstrated by many arguments that Christ was risen, and then shown what was the glorious cause of it, concluded the passage with a note of triumph, 1 Cor. 15:57, "But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." It is true that Christ conquered all on his cross: there the battle was fought and there the victory was

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gained. But that victory was made into a triumph in his resurrection. Now his enemies fled, quitting the field. Psa. 68:1, "Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered; let those also who hate him flee before him." He made a conquest of death itself, and it lay dead at his feet. Christ would never be known as a conqueror, except for this. If death had held him as her captive, where would his victory be?

3. *He rose for our justification.* "Who was delivered up because of our offences, and was raised because of our justification," Rom. 4:25. As he died to pay our debt, so he rose again to acquit or absolve us from it. Christ's resurrection was both his and our discharge: his, when he stood as our surety bond for us, and ours, as those for whom he was Surety. As Christ by dying was made virtually, so by rising he becomes actually the object of our justifying faith.

He became a sufficient object of faith not merely by undertaking to appear in our place, but by actually making an end of the transgressions on our account and paying our whole debt. If he had not made satisfaction for us, we could not in justice have been pardoned. If he had not fully reconciled us to God and completely answered the Law's demands, we could not have been saved. Therefore if he had continued on in death, it would have shown the continuing need for payment; which would have revealed its imperfection, and consequently its invalidity. Christ could not rise until justice acquitted him. His bond was submitted for our cause, and it must be accepted by the Judge, and that only by a full payment of the bond. When he arose, this bond was returned to him, and cancelled. Our debt is paid, our bond is returned. Therefore his resurrection stands in opposition to all that could be laid to our charge, Rom. 8:34. Therefore this is one of the arguments that the Apostle uses to prove that Christ must be risen, "And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!" 1 Cor. 15:17.

4. *It was to put Christ into a proper condition for the completing of the work remaining in the execution of his offices.* We observed in a previous sermon that Christ executes his offices in both states of Humiliation and Exaltation. As our Priest he was to satisfy justice for us, and afterwards to intercede for us, Heb. 7:25. As our Prophet, here he taught with his mouth, but there he sent forth his Spirit, and therefore he had to go to the Father, John 16:17. As our King, here he commanded his disciples and gave them laws, but he must also govern them by his power and wield the sceptre over the world. This was accomplished by his resurrection, Psa. 2:6 and following, cf. Acts 13:33. Indeed, there was the glory of a mediator promised to him as a reward for his obedience, and it was necessary for

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him to rise in order to take possession of it, Luke 24:26, “Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?”

5. *It was necessary for him to rise, so he would be the first fruits of our resurrection, both spiritually and bodily.* See 1 Cor. 15:20-23. By *first fruits* we are not to understand first in order of time, but in order of causation. Those who rose at Christ’s death, as described in the Gospel, Matt. 27:52,53, rose by the power and influence of his resurrection. Furthermore it is a sure pledge of the resurrection of his members. When the first fruits were offered to God under the Law, he accepted them and gave his people an assurance of the harvest. The Apostle makes the same point in 1 Cor. 15 using the order of the covenants. Just as Adam in the first covenant, standing for us, procured death for us, so Christ in the new covenant, being our Surety, has purchased a resurrection for us. His resurrection is the earnest of ours, 1 Cor. 15:20.

To summarise, Christ as God is the efficient cause: Christ as our substitute satisfying for our sins is the meritorious cause: Christ rising from the dead is the continuing cause of our resurrection. “A little while longer and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you will live also,” John 14:19.

*APPLICATION 1. Learn from this, that it is the concern of all those who desire a joyful, triumphant resurrection at last, to get and secure a claim to Christ’s resurrection.* There will be a general rising again of all who die, both just and unjust, but no one will rise in glory except those who are under the saving power of the resurrection of Christ.

Others shall rise only to receive an everlasting second fall into the bottomless pit of never-ending miseries. As long as men are out of Christ, thoughts of the resurrection may well be full of dread, for it is that which truly makes death to be a reason for terror. If death were to put an end to the being of men, it would not have such fearfulness in it, as it does when one considers that after death comes a dreadful judgement and then a resurrection to condemnation. To think that I must be restored to an incorruptible state for the purpose of being prepared to suffer eternal torments, and lie in everlasting burning, is a most confounding thought. Is it enough to cause us to seriously enquire how may we escape this doom, and be happy at the last day? The solution is, let us get the power of Christ’s resurrection applied to us, first to raise us up from sin, which is done in this life, and then to raise us up to glory, which will be at the last day. The second depends upon the first. Let us make sure, then, that he rose for our justification by being in him by faith, and so we shall be both justified and glorified by him at that day.

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APPLICATION 2. *Let us labour to get our faith strengthened and established by rightly meditating on the resurrection of Christ.* Let this satisfy us, that Christ has made a complete redemption, as the Apostle argues, Heb. 7:25. Justice had him in its hands, it put him to death, but it has released him. A risen Surety must be a sufficient Saviour: there can no longer be any reason to question whether the justice of God is satisfied. Let this encourage us to go to Christ to finish all that is lacking in our being prepared for eternal life. Remember, he is exalted for this very purpose, to complete what he began in his earthly life and death.

Application 3. *Let the consideration of our interest in his resurrection help us to triumph over death and the grave.* Christ is risen and gone to heaven: he is our forerunner to take possession in our name and make ready our accommodations. Let us cheerfully follow him, rejoicing in the hope of a happy rising, and being with him forever.

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